ANN: NEW BOOK Jan Mrázek, On This Modern Highway, Lost in the Jungle: Tropics, Travel, and Colonialism in Czech Poetry

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I am happy to share that my latest book has been published:


“I love Christmas, that Muslim holiday.” (K. Biebl)

Konstantin Biebl (1898-1951) was a well-known Czech avant-garde poet, a communist and a surrealist in complicated and shifting ways. He was born in Bohemia in the Habsburg Empire, travelled to multiple “Orients” (Galicia and southeastern Europe) as a soldier in the First World War, and in 1926, he journeyed from Prague to Java via Ceylon and Singapore. In his texts, poetic and often comic, both landlocked Bohemia and the colonized tropical islands are seen disorientingly anew, like “mirrors looking at themselves in each other.” My book takes the reader on a journey crisscrossing the poet’s life and work, with particular attention to his travel writing and his imagery of colonial Asia. Biebl’s trip and his poetry, narrative accounts, and photographs, are at the core of the book, but they are also an entry point to a broader study of travel and/as poetry, images of home and otherness, and attitudes to colonial/social injustice, from nineteenth-century Czech Romanticism to the interwar avant-garde and to post-war poetics and politics under socialism. More than a biography, the book is a conversation about poetic travel—specifically between Bohemia, with its particular history of being “colonized”, uniquely “Eastern” and uniquely “European,” and Java under the Dutch—and about modernity, colonialism, race, and distance, and how they are overcome or not by travel and poetry. The text is punctuated by numerous original translations of Czech texts as well as visual illustrations, giving a rich sense of Czech tropics.

A **sample chapter** can be downloaded at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358977936_On_This_Modern_Highway_Lost_in_the_Jungle_Tropics_Travel_and_Colonialism_in_Czech_Poetry](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358977936_On_This_Modern_Highway_Lost_in_the_Jungle_Tropics_Travel_and_Colonialism_in_Czech_Poetry)